

# Two Ways to Get Better ROI from Student Recruitment Agents

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It has been nearly a year and a half now since I made the journey over from working at a university international office to being part of a team within a student placement organization, or to use the more common parlance, an agent.

Having been engaged in some capacity with agents for almost 14 years prior to working at IDP, I felt reasonably confident in my knowledge. However I have come to realize that I had a number of preconceptions and, dare I say, misconceptions about what it is to effectively manage the relationship and support an agent network.

The majority of UK institutions have been working successfully with agents now for some time; many have robust processes and procedures in place to deal with agent enquiries and applications effectively, they also offer regular training be it via virtual platforms, face to face in-country or even through training conferences in the UK. However there is one area where, in my opinion, we as a sector can continue to improve and in doing so really add value for agent partners.

A recurring theme in my conversations with IDP colleagues across our global network of more than 30 countries is the hunger for stronger, differentiated messaging about the specific programs of study that UK institutions have to offer, this includes tangible evidence of excellence along with further case studies showcasing employability, student success and value for money.

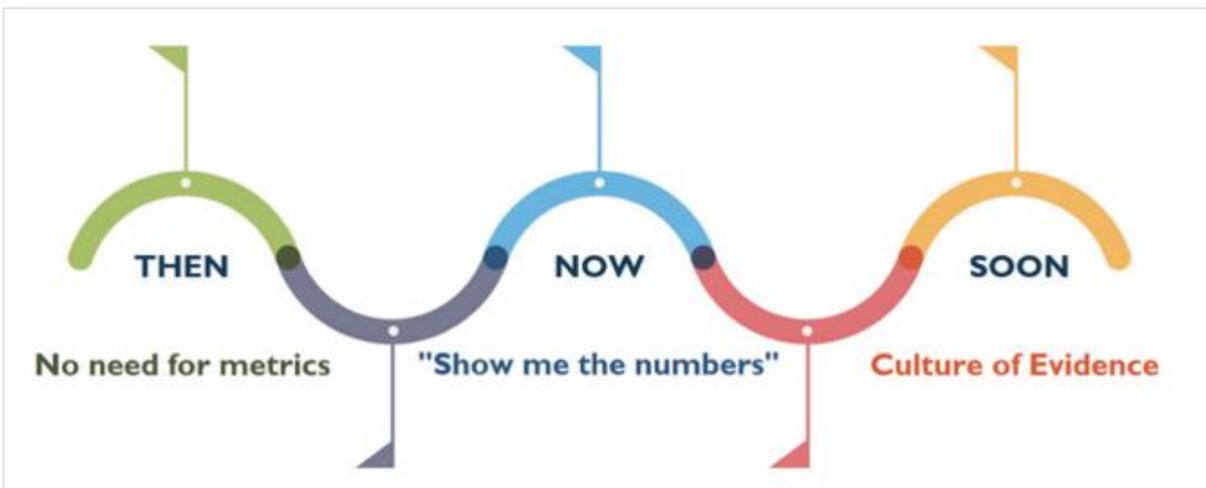
An additional factor that has also become apparent to me, again following feedback from my colleagues overseas, is the need for institutions to undertake further destination marketing in relation to their town / city and region. This is relevant on two levels; firstly, where there is perhaps an understandable leaning towards London when students and parents think of the UK and have less

awareness of other locations. Second, and I feel this is particularly pertinent given the current political discourse in the aftermath of the EU Referendum, is to help present the UK as a welcoming, tolerant and safe place to study.

Institutions are facing increasing scrutiny to generate more student enrolments often with fixed or reduced marketing and recruitment budgets, and also to justify their spend in key markets during straitened times. Being able to show greater ROI from their international efforts and, in this case their agent network, should help to alleviate some of this pressure. It is a question of working smarter rather than harder, taking ownership of the narrative and focusing on those things within our sphere of control. A variation on the [Hedgehog Concept](#) you might say. It is also critical that institutions do not chase the low hanging fruit at the expense of other markets. We are in a cyclical industry and history has shown that markets almost always bounce back, it's important therefore not to neglect or *be seen* to neglect them. People have long memories and no one appreciates fair-weather friends.

I was pleased and intrigued to see a recent article in ICEF Monitor on a broad ranging model that attempts to [measure the ROI of international student recruitment](#) whilst also acknowledging some of the more elusive associated costs that will be harder to pin down. This is always going to be a challenge for the HE sector as it inherently involves taking a more commercial approach to recruitment practices, and this does not always sit so comfortably within the culture of institutions or with the sometimes archaic infrastructure / systems that colleagues grapple with. However we have seen in the last decade, with the banking crisis and subsequent pressures placed on Governments that have then

been passed on to the sector in various ways that institutions are having to be leaner and smarter. Therefore "commercial" in this sense is not a pejorative term but a short hand for professional, strategic and externally focused.



*A historical conception of the institutional demand for ROI data. Source: ROIIE*

**Part of this article is an extract from an [original blog post](#) for Universities UK International.**